

LOVE AND THE BEAUTY-DOCTOR

BY WALLACE IRWIN

AUTHOR OF "LETTERS OF A JAPANESE SCHOOLBOY," ETC.

THE gods of things as they ain't, who go about fitting square pegs into round holes, are not infrequently triumphant. For instance, they once decreed that a deaf man should go in for music. His name was Beethoven, and he got the ages by the ears.

According to the same chaotic rule, also, many of our bright clowns are dyspeptics, and baldness seems to be a special scourge among barbers. Or, if you want an example which applies more directly to our theme, take the case of Lorenzo P. Dilk, rough hewn as Abe Lincoln and idolized as a first baseman in his college days.

You would naturally have picked Lorenzo as a future Senator from Kansas or a subcontractor on the Panama Canal. Instead of which he "drifted" to New York, and succeeded prodigiously as home and fashion editor of the *Daily Echo*. There is a Latin proverb covering this class of phenomenon—too bad I've forgotten it! Let us step into our story.

It was in the muddy month of May, approaching the hour sacred to luncheon, when Lorenzo P. Dilk entered the Restaurant Lafayette, reserved a table for two, and sat in the pink plush waiting-room in an attitude appropriate to the place. His home and fashion duties had given Lorenzo a serious habit of expression, but to-day there was a spring-time melancholy toying with his brow. His look was too listless for that of an engaged man; yet as many as a dozen people knew that he was to wed Miss Antoinette Pelton, according to the most approved fashion-page etiquette, in the month of June.

Lorenzo was to meet Annie to-day for the first time in eight weeks—she had been lingering among the tennis-courts of the Pacific coast. Of course she was late.

The fashion editor of the *Echo* was too manly a man to admire this quality in

woman. He stood up. He sat down. He lit a cigarette. Finally, sighing deeply, he dived into his inside pocket, and brought forth a home and fashion page torn from the current issue of the *Morning Glory*, his rival. A face of pure and piquant beauty smiled from the center of the sheet under a lively caption which read:

Mlle. VALERIE, FAMOUS BEAUTY DOCTOR, ASKS—
"ARE ATHLETIC GIRLS BEAUTIFUL?"

Lorenzo gazed upon the lovely face with much the expression of baffled longing with which *Menelaus* might have looked from afar, through opera-glasses, upon *Helen* stolen from Troy. For there had been a little newspaper "*Iliad*" fought over this mysterious Valerie. Dilk, through many tempting letters, had tried to attach her to his page on the *Echo*, but Hooley of the *Morning Glory* had cut in with a superior offer; and Valerie had gone over to the enemy, much to the advantage of the latter's circulation.

Her taunting, alluring smile, daily seen entrenched behind the *Morning Glory's* bulwark of type, cast a sort of fairy spell about Lorenzo P. Dilk, to whom success on a home and fashion page represented about all the sweetness that life could hold. He admired her more than any living creature. Although he had never seen her in the flesh, he seemed to know her intimately. Was it possible that he was falling in love with a picture?

"Are athletic girls beautiful?" asked Valerie, with the perfect cock-sureness of a popular preacher. "My answer to this question is: No! Though poets may sing the charms of milady's cheek kissed by wind and sun, it is nevertheless a scientific fact that wind and sun are natural enemies of complexion. In the case of my own beauty—which I am said to possess in abundance—I have obtained my effects

through careful protection from the outdoors, rather than exposure to it. At the risk of being accused of making a sweeping assertion, I might say that there is but one form of exercise conducive to feminine loveliness, and that is dancing. Tennis broadens the wrists and ankles, while golf is apt to give an unwomanly squareness to the shoulders.

"A member of the diplomatic corps once asked me to give him the secret of my beauty. To him I made my now famous reply:

"A woman, to be beautiful, must avoid becoming too healthy."

After a good double column of these inspiring generalities there followed a hundred useful hints for the cure of common infirmities, such as falling hair, protruding teeth, obesity, warts, and a tendency to snore. A quarter-page advertisement for "Valerie's Three B's—Beauty Bath Balm"—proclaimed that Bottle No. 1 refreshed hair and scalp, No. 2 acted as a food for the skin, and No. 3 contained the ingredients of a magic mole-destroyer. The mysterious Valerie was apparently not in the business for fame alone.

"Lorry, dear!" said a thrushlike voice piping across Mr. Dilk's meditations.

"Annie!"

Lorenzo leaped to his feet. The reception-room was absolutely empty—so why should he not?

"Naughty boy, you've knocked my hat all on one side!" she said, as he removed the crumpled fashion page from her lace collar. She was slender and brown, with the kind of crystal-clear eyes that Keats and Harry von Tilzer have sung so often. "What's that paper you've been reading, all in a trance?"

"Oh—you've been away, so you haven't seen it—it's Valerie's page—she writes the corkingest drool—"

"Drool?"

"Oh, I mean it in the newspaper sense. She gets out a daily beauty dope-sheet for the *Morning Glory*, you know. Look at her picture—ain't she a peach?"

Annie held Valerie's classic features critically before her nose.

"Do you call *that* good-looking?" she said.

"She's a perfect pippin. I tried to buy her for the *Echo*, but the *Morning Glory* cut in on me, hard luck! Everybody's crazy about her."

"I think she looks like a chorus-girl," said Annie.

"But just read her drivel—it's great! See what she says about athletic girls and beauty—"

"I'm hungry. Let's go in to lunch!"

The table-cloth between them seemed to widen into eons of difference as they sat down in the inner dining-room. Annie prattled of May Sutton, and of championship singles at Coronado and Santa Barbara. In the stronger light Lorenzo noticed that his heart's delight was peeling slightly across the nose.

"Are athletic girls beautiful?" the haunting voice of Mlle. Valerie seemed to be chiming in his ear.

Almost desperately, Lorenzo felt for her fingers under the table-cloth. He found them and reestablished—for the time being—his broken line of communication.

"Honey-bug, we will live out in the country, won't we?" she asked.

"Yes, dear." He hated commuting. "Why should we live in the country?"

"The air in town smells like—everything. I want to be out where I—where we can live; where I can ride a horse and be near a country-club."

Duty was tugging at his elbow whispering "Go on!" He demurred.

"Dearest," he said, "you're perfectly beautiful now; but did it ever occur to you that golf and tennis and riding and all that sort of thing can be overdone—that a girl might lose a lot of her fine points from too much—"

"Precious! Who ever has been putting that stuff into your head?"

"Mlle. Valerie says—"

Phrenologists say that black brows, close together, denote a jealous disposition. Annie Pelton's brows almost met over her nose.

"How long have you known this Valerie person?" she asked.

"I don't know her—honest, I never met her. Just saw her picture and read her dope in the *Morning Glory*—"

"Let's see her ridiculous page," said the girl, extending a small, white hand.

With trembling fingers Lorenzo presented the sheet containing the beauty-doctor's daily wisdom.

"Are athletic girls beautiful?" Annie read aloud, very distinctly. "My answer to this question is: No!—a scientific fact that wind and sun are natural enemies of

the complexion—tennis broadens the wrists and ankles, while '—"

Annie threw down the paper with a laugh. It was a silvery laugh with little icicles tinkling around the edge.

"How *per-fectly in-sult-ing!*" she said, rising and drawing on her gloves.

"But, Annie, I—"

"You needn't explain. I'm sorry my appearance is so offensive to you. When I want some suggestions on beauty, I'll call on you—you and this French woman. Don't follow me, please!"

When Lorenzo reached the door, she was already in a taxicab honking angrily up University Place.

Lorenzo P. Dilk stood on the steps of the Lafayette and whistled inanely to himself.

"You never can tell which way they're going to jump," reflected the editor of the most successful woman's page in New York.

II

DILK pulled his hat down in front and shuffled away toward the Fourteenth Street Subway station. On the platform, among the crowd waiting for the down-town express, he spied a short, fat man smoking a long, thin cigar. You or I or *Sherlock Holmes*, casting upon him our keen, deductive glance, would have noted his brown derby, his self-figured waistcoat, and his horseshoe pin; and without hesitation we should have given his profession as that of "sporting individual."

Bernard Hooley had, in fact, begun life as a herald of events at Saratoga and the Sharkey Athletic Club. He had been an efficient sporting reporter until the day, big with fate, when Miss Rundle, then editing the woman's page on the *Morning Glory*, had been suddenly called away, and Hooley had as suddenly been set to writing her daily "Chit-Chat for Girls." Hooley's pen imparted to that column the living fire which it had lacked before; result, he was made permanent head of the woman's page at more than double his former salary. All of which goes to prove once more that there is no sex in art.

Hooley waved a current number of the *Morning Glory* in a friendly palm.

"What d'ye think of our little wonder?" he said, triumphantly pointing to the portrait which appeared under the caption "Mlle. Varelle Says."

"It's some drool, all right," agreed Lorenzo, curbing his admiration.

"Some drool—say, kiddo, she's the fountainhead of all drool! Why, a column of her stuff makes the Beattie murder trial look like real-estate news!"

"There are others," said Lorenzo, with studied indifference.

"Where? On the planet Mars, perhaps, but not on this rolling orb. The only other one is Ella Spieler Simcox, and she's got a lame wrist. Women like that ain't born—they just occur. The woods are full of Kiplings and Maurice Hewletts and Arnold Bennetts; but there's only one real drool artist born in a generation, and we've got her workin' for the *Morning Glory*, with all syndicate rights reserved."

"All rights reserved on her patent medicine ads, too, I suppose?"

"Oh, her bottled dope's all right! Never been known to kill anybody yet—which is a pretty high record for a patent product. Still, we ain't responsible for what might happen to a piker that used her mole-eradicator as a tooth-wash."

The approaching train showed its dragon's eyes in the distant cavern. Lorenzo stared at the melting loveliness of Valerie's printed likeness.

"Is she as—er—peachy as that?" he asked.

"Haven't you ever seen her?" inquired Bernard Hooley, looking up suspiciously at Dilk.

"No, I haven't," admitted Lorenzo.

"It ain't because you haven't tried," said Hooley, grinning broadly. "I'll tell you one thing about her—that picture don't do her half justice. You know how photos are. It only gives you a faint idea of what a looker she really is."

"But can't it be arranged?"

"Not through our office—and not through any other, as long as she's workin' for us. Her beauty-parlor's advertised, with an address somewhere on Sixth Avenue—why don't you hunt her up there, if you want an interview?"

"Oh, you know mighty well I've been there. She never sees anybody."

"You discovered that fact, did you? Well, well! We're modest violets in our shop—we don't hawk our beauties around in show-cases. It fades 'em."

"But is she—"

The question was crushed out in a carnival of discord as the train shuttled in

with a bellow and the crowd stampeded for the open door, to the Interborough's acrid invitation to "step lively, please!"

A moment later the rival fashion editors were being whirled through the gullet of earth amid those steely groanings and apocalyptic roars which make a college yell sound like a bird-song in the midst of many cyclones.

III

ANNIE PELTON stood before a pier-glass in her baby-blue boudoir. She was wearing a loose, lacy jacket thing, and her nut-brown hair was hanging down her back. Her parents were still out of town, which was fortunate, because Annie was preparing to take a radical step—and parents are notorious conservatives.

On a toilet-table beside her reposed bottles of various sizes, shapes, and colors, each plainly labeled "Valerie's Three B's—Beauty Bath Balm." Furthermore, the bottles were marked "One," "Two," and "Three," respectively. In her right hand the girl clasped a small booklet, "Valerie's Guide to Perfection." Awakening vanity was suppressing the jealous pang in her bosom. She would avail herself of the enchantress's wicked arts, and win her mad Lorenzo back again.

She examined herself as impartially as any woman can. Too much bouncing about after rubber balls under a California sun had faded her pretty brown hair in streaks. A chain of freckles marked a tiny archipelago across her forehead. She noted these blemishes, at the same time sniffing angrily at the phrenologic fault in man which sets him sighing after a doll of wax.

She turned the pages of the booklet to the paragraph beginning:

To refresh faded hair—Apply Preparation No. 1 to scalp with fine sponge or tooth-brush. Massage scalp lightly with finger-tips, taking care to rub toward the roots of the hair.

"How can anybody *help* rubbing toward the roots of the hair?" she asked herself.

She read further:

To beautify the skin—First sponge the face with skimmed milk, wipe dry, then apply No. 2 thoroughly with camel's-hair brush. In the morning apply Valerie's Cupid Cream. The effect will be marvelous.

It was after twelve o'clock when Annie got to bed. She had spent nearly three hours saturating her locks with bright green

liquid and anointing her face until it shone like that of an Eskimo after a banquet of blubber. She retired with her head swathed in many yards of automobile veil—a mighty head-dress resembling a maharaja's turban.

She went to sleep serene in her resolve. If it was to be a battle of beauty, she would fight Mlle. Valerie with her own subtle weapons.

But her dreams were troubled. She fancied that she had fallen from the top of a Fifth Avenue bus and landed in a load of soft coal. She had crawled out of the dingy chariot very quietly, so that nobody would notice her. Glancing at her face in her vanity-box, she had noticed a sable smudge across her nose.

"This can be removed with Valerie's Cupid Cream," she thought.

So she scuttled into a drug-store on the next corner. A female clerk waited on her—horrors! It was the perfect, supercilious Valerie herself!

"How hideous you are, meess!" said the sorceress, with a slight French accent. "Have courage! Ze Three B's will cure it!"

Whereupon the pulchritudinous beauty-doctor had brought forth a large hive labeled "Three B's," and had let forth its buzzing inhabitants, who flew straight at Annie's face, stinging it terribly.

She awoke with a scream. It was eight o'clock by the watch under her pillow. Her head ached, and her face felt hot and queer. A horrid suspicion entered her mind. Leaping out of bed, she rushed to the pier-glass and tore off her head-dress.

Horror piled upon horror! Her hair had turned magenta red overnight, and that mysterious beauty-fluid, running down from her hair, had stained a zone of arsenic green across her forehead!

Her first impulse was to laugh at the clownish color-scheme which had suddenly added complexity to her complexion. Then, suddenly, the cold fear of disfigurement came upon her.

She ran to the wash-basin, and attacked her hair and forehead with hot water liberally soaped. The scouring left no stain on the water.

She scrubbed hysterically, first with a wash-rag, then with a brush; but upon again referring to the mirror, her worst fears were substantiated. She was a study in magenta and green!

She sat down on the edge of the bed and clasped her green forehead in her white hands. What should she do?

The vile mixture of that French impostor had ruined her looks—possibly for life. Women have done murder under less provocation. Not content with stealing her Lorenzo, this Valerie had filched her complexion. Perhaps it was the outcome of a hideous plot, perhaps—

Hastily she dressed for the street, double-veiling her face from public gaze. She turned her steps toward the down-town district. Her injury demanded immediate attention. Some girls would have hurried to a doctor, but being a New Yorker, she took the straighter course. She called upon a lawyer.

The A. D. T. messenger, leisurely studying the human comedy of lower Manhattan, might have noticed a girlish figure, heavily veiled, entering the shabby law-offices of Skipe & Henderson. Mr. Lucius Skipe, his fat head tanned by time and perfidy, read the card "Miss Antoinette Pelton," and looked sharply up as that young lady, romantically disguised, entered.

Skipe & Henderson enjoyed a wide reputation as engineers of devious legal side-tracks; and Annie had hastened secretly hither, wishing to avoid her father's lawyers, who, like Mr. and Mrs. Pelton, were notorious conservatives.

"I want to sue somebody for damages," began the girl, taking a chair.

"To be sure!" agreed Mr. Skipe, rubbing a long, pointed ear with the eraser end of a pencil.

"I want to bring suit for ten thousand dollars," she went on.

"I see, I see!" smiled the gentleman, continuing his efforts to erase his organ of hearing.

"It's Mlle. Valerie, the beauty-doctor—"

"Oh! What's *she* been up to?"

Mr. Skipe leaned forward in his swivel chair, showing sudden animation.

"I'll show you," said the girl, suddenly pulling the pins from her hat and revealing her hair.

"Yes, yes—of course!" observed Mr. Skipe, articulating very deliberately, as if refusing to be surprised at anything that happened in his profession. "Am I to understand that Mlle. Valerie produced this—er—decoration?"

Annie, as briefly as woman can, related the story of the beauty-preparations.

"In my estimation ten thousand dollars is too low," said Mr. Skipe.

"It's a great deal of money, if you get it."

"If you get it—yes. But our juries are becoming so economical. Ten thousand is usually cut to a dollar and costs. There's the case of Stilton *versus* the Magic Manicure Company. Lady cut off her thumb on a patent nail-polisher—twenty-five-thousand-dollar damage suit—clear case proved by us—Mrs. Stilton got a judgment of five hundred and costs. I think we'd better make it fifty thousand."

Mr. Skipe called in his partner, the terse Mr. Henderson, and the case was reviewed more in detail.

"Have you been to a physician?" asked Mr. Henderson.

"Not yet," said the girl.

"Don't!" said the terse one.

"Not by any means!" echoed Mr. Skipe.

"You need a doctor, understand, but we will provide an efficient man—one who understands the legal aspect of such cases." Mr. Skipe looked ever so furtive.

"We'll consult with you again in this matter about Wednesday," said Skipe and Henderson simultaneously, as they bowed Miss Pelton to the door.

"And we may find further cause for action against the publishers of the *Morning Glory*, who are printing these articles," added Mr. Skipe hopefully.

IV

I KNOW a playwright so childishly sanguine that he imagines himself bound to succeed as a dramatist, merely because he can write a good play. Annie had some of this unreasonable trustfulness. Never having been concerned in a lawsuit before, she indulged in vain visionings under her magenta curls. She saw herself triumphantly waving fifty thousand-dollar bills over the prostrate form of the once beautiful Valerie, who was now appropriately writhing in the dust of bankruptcy.

Exulting in hypothetical vengeance, she looked up Valerie's Beauty Parlors in the telephone-book when she got home. And this is what she wrote:

DEAR MADAM:

I don't know what the correct legal phrases are, but this is to notify you that I have used your abominable preparations, which have ruined my hair and complexion, and I am going to bring suit against you. I write you this to give

you an opportunity to leave the country quietly before you are obliged to pay the costs of this action, which will be very large.

And when you have departed, I hope you will find some better business than publishing your face on woman's pages and making the men act like a pack of idiots. Your advice to girls is as spurious as your medicine. I don't believe you'd recognize a really beautiful girl if you met one face to face. Mr. Dilk of the *Daily Echo*, although he may have been foolish at first, quite agrees with my opinion of you.

Yours truly,

ANTOINETTE PELTON.

On Thursday, at noon, Bernard Hooley of the *Morning Glory* crossed over to the table where Lorenzo P. Dilk of the *Daily Echo* was lunching moodily alone at Keene's.

"Why don't you fellows settle it out of court?" asked Hooley anxiously.

"What out of court?" asked Dilk peevishly. Thus he had been since Annie ceased speaking to him, three days ago.

"Come off!" said the tall fashion editor. "We're all wise that you fellows hired the girl to spoil her face with Valerie's beauty-dope. Of course, quite natural, you're bringing suit to do us. But look here, old man, you've got an awful weak case. You can't win, and what's the use of dragging Valerie into court? She just simply can't appear, that's all!"

"Who the deuce wants her to appear?" snarled Dilk.

"You do—or the girl that's ruined her complexion does, and that's the same thing."

"Would you kindly inform me what you're driving at? What girl?"

"Oh, you're wise, all right! But if you've got to be fed the facts out of a bottle, I'll tell you who I mean. I mean the Miss Antoinette Pelton who's trying to soak Mlle. Valerie fifty thou' because she rubbed some angel-face cream on her complex' and turned her hair pea-green and her skin sky-blue—or some fancy colored post-card effect like that."

"Good Lord!" whispered Dilk, rising, and rushing toward the telephone-booth.

"You ain't going to tip this off to your paper, are you?" shouted Hooley after him.

"Not if I know it!" said Lorenzo, as he swung the booth door shut.

He rang up the Peltons' flat. No, Miss Pelton was not at home. And Mrs. Pelton? Still in California. When would Miss

Pelton be in? Couldn't say, but would tell her he had called her up.

Lorenzo strode away. A vulture the size of an ostrich seemed pecking away at his breast. He'd started all this beauty-doctor nonsense, and Annie, poor girl, after martyring herself, was going to add trouble to trouble by dragging the matter into court. He could squelch the scandal in his own paper, and he knew that the *Morning Glory's* self-interest counseled silence; but once out, the news would be blossoming into florid head-lines in all the dailies on Manhattan.

Where had Annie hidden so mysteriously? Had that dreadful Valerie stuff ruined her brain as well as her beauty?

He found himself standing, dazed, at the corner of Sixth Avenue and Thirty-Second Street. The idea occurred to him to call on Valerie herself and request some solution to the riddle.

As he mounted the narrow stairs which bore the brass sign "Valerie's Beauty Parlors, Second Floor," a tall, splendidly formed woman, veiled like a houri, swept past him. He hesitated a moment, and before he could take after her, she had whisked into a cab. As she passed, Lorenzo had one of those illuminating flashes which women call "intuition" and men call "hunch." That mysterious figure was Valerie seeking concealment!

The beauty-parlor door led into a tiny office-room, guarded by a pink boy, who was chewing gum.

"Out!" said the boy when he saw Dilk's card.

"Was that Mlle. Valerie I just passed on the stairs?"

"Dunno. She's out."

"Did she leave a minute ago?"

"Say!" said the pink one, pausing for the space of forty chews. "I know youse—you're a ree-porter from the *Echo*. Good night!"

V

MEANWHILE Annie Pelton sat alone in her boudoir, gazing at herself in a silver hand-glass. In addition to its unwelcome color-scheme, her face wore what the novelists call "a look of mingled relief and irritation."

The gorgeous sunset tints left by the "Three B's" were undoubtedly fading fast. The verdant splash across her forehead had taken on a light pastel shade, and her hair

was turning from a violent magenta to a purplish brown. It was evidently not going to be permanent—but her chances in a lawsuit faded with the dyes. How, then, to wreak her vengeance on the designing goddess, Valerie?

But no girl can remain in a peevish frame of mind when she discovers she is not so hideous as she thought. She was also beginning to consider what her horrified parents would say when they read about the trial in the newspapers. She permitted herself two medium-sized tears, too, when she thought of poor Lorenzo, who had been wearing out the telephone with hourly but unanswered messages.

A maid tapped at the door and handed in a square envelope, which was magenta in color and reminded her unpleasantly of her hair. It bore in the upper left-hand corner the word "Valerie." She broke the seal and read:

MY DEAR CHILD:

I received your letter, and was surprised at your apparently serious intention of bringing suit against me.

You mention Mr. Dilk—whom I have not the pleasure of knowing personally, although I have had two or three business letters from his office. I can see everything. You have no cause for being jealous, my dear; and as to the distressing mishap which has befallen you, I am sure I can remedy it in a very few moments. I may say candidly that it would not be well for either of us if this ridiculous matter were aired in court. If Messrs. Skipe & Henderson were reputable lawyers, they would tell you the same.

I cannot appear in public, and I am sure it would be extremely unwise for any well-bred girl—as I am sure you are—to be dragged into such a comedy case and lampooned in all the papers as the "girl with the magenta hair." You haven't the remotest chance of winning your suit. I will tell you why, if you will come to me this afternoon at six o'clock. Will you come? Half a moment with me, and you will see how foolish you were to be jealous!

Sincerely,

Mlle. Valerie.

VI

At six o'clock, the pink office-boy, affable though working overtime, arose from his desk and ushered Annie Pelton into an inner waiting-room—a wonderful creation lined with cerise brocade, background for numerous enlarged photographs of Lillian Russell, the Venus de Milo, and other monuments of never-aging art.

An exceedingly plain, elderly, business-

like little woman with the nose of a Cæsar and thick, near-sighted spectacles, came forth and examined Annie's card. The girl, following her guide, marveled that the astute Valerie, ever alert to effect, should permit so ill-favored a secretary to flourish in this Eve's paradise.

The wizened female paused at the door of an office marked "Private," and motioned the girl into a room barely furnished with a mission oak desk and two or three chairs. A young man was occupying one of the chairs, and Annie nearly swooned when she beheld him. It was Lorenzo P. Dilk!

For a moment the girl saw green, jealous lights; but before she could give expression to anything in particular, the little woman seated herself at the desk and took on an expression of authority.

"Well, Miss Pelton, we are all together, I think," she said dryly.

"But I called to see Mlle. Valerie," said Miss Pelton.

"I am Mlle. Valerie," said the plain person, smiling a large smile and showing a set of white but jagged teeth.

Lorenzo P. Dilk jumped as if propelled by an interior spring, but Annie sat still, breathing very hard.

"I can't understand," she faltered. "I thought you were—"

"You thought I was beautiful," said the elderly woman. "Lots of people think so, too. Nobody ever sees me, you know. It would be nice to be pretty, I guess; but I'm not sure but what it's better to be wise. Handsome is as handsome writes, I often think. I've been making quite a decent living selling my literary and medicinal nostrums, so I infer from the results that I do it rather well."

"But is it right to go on pretending you're something you're not?"

"What marvelous eyes you have, my child!" said Valerie good-naturedly. "Why should I, more than others, avoid being something I am not? You know what Shakespeare says—'Some folks have their jobs thrust upon them.' I inherited this business from a brother who drank himself to death. I couldn't make a living at dress-making, and Dan left me his six children to support; so here I am! Perhaps an extraordinarily plain person like me hasn't a right to advise girls how to be beautiful—but we live in an age of humbug. Look at Mr. Dilk, for instance. What right has

a great, raw-boned specimen like that to be editing a woman's page? Yet he writes about hot-weather luncheons and sanitary nurseries in a way that would fool any housewife. He even fooled *me* for a while. A homely old maid advising vain girls and a husky young bachelor lecturing little mothers—isn't it odd how we get away with it, Mr. Dilk? I think it must prove some great universal principle. Maybe it goes to show that the best critics are the rank outsiders." Mlle. Valerie turned her brisk, toothful grin upon Annie. "And now, my dear, about that little legal question."

"Your medicine," began the girl, pulling out her hatpins.

"Yes. I understand. It turned your hair a bright tint of magenta. Wonderful green spots all over your complexion, too, probably."

"Who told you?" asked Annie Pelton.

"My legal adviser, common sense," said the homely woman. "The same thing has happened once or twice before."

"Well, is that the sort of preparation to poke off on the unsuspecting public as a beautifier?"

"It is, if you use it right. Shoe-polish and face-powders are both beautifiers—in their proper places; but you should know which to use on your nose, and which on your toes, to obtain an esthetic result. Did you read instructions before applying my medicine?"

"I certainly did—'Rub No. 1 into the roots of the hair with a tooth-brush'—'Apply No. 2 to the skin with camel's-hair brush,' the directions read."

"That's what they say," agreed Mlle. Valerie, "but the trouble is you didn't do accordingly. You rubbed No. 3 in your hair—that's a mole-eradicator. And the stuff you put on your cheeks was out of No. 1—a hair tonic. Let me look at your hair." She looked over the girl's slightly damaged tresses with an expert's eye. "I could give you a preparation—but no! Nature and a week will do the trick. So, you see, you haven't such a damage case against me, after all."

Valerie stood back a pace and surveyed Annie with little, birdlike sparks twinkling through her glasses.

"Child, why in the world do you smear beauty stuff on your face?"

"I've been reading your advertisements," said Annie.

"Beauty-doctors are for homely folks—

and I'm a physician who can't cure herself. What is there in the drug-store that wouldn't harm a complexion like yours? Pure blood coursing under pure skin! Am I a vandal, that I should want to gild rose-leaves? I think your young man will agree with me."

"He surely will!" echoed Lorenzo, in spite of Annie's ironic laugh.

"My! How I wish I had your photo to sign 'Mlle. Valerie,' instead of the one I've got!" sighed the old maid.

"Mlle. Valerie," said Dilk, after a pause, "might I ask who is the original of the picture you've been passing off as your own?"

Valerie turned toward the window, her shoulders beginning to heave strangely. When she looked round again, she was wiping her eyes.

"My! This has been an awful day for office secrets. Will you promise faithfully not to tell?"

"I promise."

"What was it you liked especially about that girl's face, as you saw it in the photograph?"

"It was so beautiful and yet so sort of—alive," admitted Dilk. "It was so human, and appealing, and intelligent, and full of sympathy."

"Bosh!" said Annie.

"This is her history, as far as I am concerned," said Valerie. "Three years ago, I was badly in need of a beautiful model to pose as myself. She had to be about perfect, so you see I had a long, hard search. I guess I inspected more than a thousand chorus-girls and twice that number of shop-ladies and studio beauties. Each one had some fatal defect. Finally, I found the right one on Fifth Avenue, right in sight of the passing throng. She was a beauty-doctor's ideal. I wanted to photograph her, but the man who kept the shop wouldn't let me. Finally I had to buy her—"

"Buy her!" gasped the amazed visitors.

"Yes, my good children. And now let the private Mlle. Valerie introduce her public self!"

The little old maid rose, and pulled aside a pair of curtains leading into an alcove behind the desk. And there stood revealed a silk-robed, queenly, gracious one, who wore the facial perfection that had made Mlle. Valerie famous in forty States.

She was a wax dummy!